

MasterApprentice

by Lady BD

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Summary: After the Battle of Naboo, Obi-Wan is alone with his thoughts

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The bier was surprisingly small for so large a man. Or perhaps, Obi-Wan thought, he had just seemed that way. Perhaps he was always this size, and his student was truly seeing him only now. Or perhaps it was simply that this was just the second time Qui-Gon Jinn's former Padawan had ever seen his Master lying down. Sprawled on the ground a few times, yes, that he had witnessed. But this? In repose, his features tranquil. It was a parody of peace which Obi-Wan deeply resented. His Master lay slain before him, and yet he seemed to slumber only.

Once again, against his will, Obi-Wan remembered the first time he had seen Qui-Gon completely prone. And even as the images flashed across his mind it was the feel of the man he remembered most. Not his desperate, pain laden voice or the pleading expression on his face, but the physical feeling of him. The weight of the man, as he somehow grew heavier, the life fading from his body. That feeling had invaded his thoughts. His dreams. Obi-Wan wondered, not for the first time, if he might actually be haunted.

Passionate. A Jedi is not this thing!

It was as though Master Yoda spoke beside him. Or perhaps inside him would be more accurate. It would not be the first time. A Jedi does not feel fear, or pain, or sorrow, or grief. Such negativity can only come from the Dark Side. They do not feel anger either, which he knew could only mean one thing. Council or no, title or no, Obi-Wan Kenobi could not possibly be ready to assume the responsibilities of a Jedi. Not yet. Not when so much heartache and bitterness consumed him. When the grass and cobblestones beneath his boots seemed to weep Qui-Gon's name.

There had been a memorial that afternoon - a gathering of the Jedi a few hours before the funeral. Those who knew him stood to speak of him, quietly and with reverence. They spoke of the heroic deeds of Qui-Gon Jinn - of his dedication to the Jedi cause, of his years of selfless service. No one made mention of his sense of humor, or his rare but wonderful laugh. The fact that he was often space sick and disliked almost all forms of intoxicants. Qui-Gon loved all living things and often defied conventional wisdom to help a creature in need. No mention was given of his admiration of the desert, or that he often wished for an artist's abilities to paint what he saw. He studied the smallest flowers and found them astonishing. Often he pointed out the shape of a leaf, the veins running through it, as though discovering the wonder of life anew. The members who spoke on his behalf recited Qui-Gon's resume and felt that to be sufficient. The deeds represented the man.

All the while Obi-Wan Kenobi, the most recent Jedi Knight, the newest and youngest in a line of ten-thousand strong, remained silent. He dared not speak his heart, for fear of proving himself unworthy of the honor bestowed upon him. A single lucky stroke, born in the heat of passion, the Force singing in his veins, and for that they made him a Knight. Heart breaking, utterly still, he stood beside his fallen Master and listened to them speak of a man he barely recognized.

The charade must continue. For the sake of his final promise, it had to. Only a full Jedi could train a Padawan. With his dying breath Qui-Gon had begged his student to train the boy. Therefore, deserved or no, Obi-Wan retained his rank, his silence masking the hollow sham his life had suddenly become.

How can one admit to a love which is strictly forbidden?

How can one deny it?

The question plagued the young Jedi as the Naboo sun slowly set, bathing the Temple of Theed in a fiery glow Qui-Gon would have quietly delighted in. The memorial over, Obi-Wan elected to remain by his Master's side, to meditate - that was what he assured the other Jedi. They had nodded sympathetically and left him alone. To meditate. If only they understood on what his meditations dwelled.

To live a lie, to deny his feelings, was surely to invite the dark path. To admit the truth, the depth of his emotions, would be to give in to an essential weakness, to confess what many of the Council already suspected: he wasn't ready. To follow this path would not only discredit himself, it would dishonor the memory of his mentor. Perhaps Qui-Gon's unconventional beliefs had somehow rubbed off on his student, and would now translate to Anakin.

Obi-Wan closed his eyes, lost in the thoughts which plagued him. It was as though the Sith Lord had somehow contaminated him. Beaten in battle, the creature had spewed up one final curse. No matter which way he turned, Obi-Wan saw no other path than that which led down. To the darkness.

He had never been tempted to the dark path. It simply held no appeal, he didn't even understand it. Not until he watched his Master fall.

In truth, the slide had begun shortly before that fateful event. He could remember it with perfect clarity. The first moment he had felt fear - true fear, was when he was introduced to Anakin Skywalker. It was not the boy himself that frightened him. It was Qui-Gon's expression as he watched the boy. He felt that fear again, though he tried with all he was to quell it, when Qui-Gon defied the council, demanding to train the boy himself. Though they said nothing, they knew. Knew of Obi-Wan's failing then, and surely knew that it was in anger that he slew Qui-Gon's murderer.

Fear and Anger. The path to the Dark Side are they.

Yes. He knew it. And it seemed that, since meeting Anakin, they had become a constant part of his life. Like an addiction, they were unwelcome, but impossible to be rid of.

He was unsurprised to find his face wet with tears as he reviewed that last terrible moment yet again. Without thought he reached forward, clasping Qui-Gon's hand, feeling the cold of his flesh seep into his own and, somehow, into his heart. The regret he felt consumed him suddenly as Qui-Gon's face, the expression of shocked denial, swam before him again. Eyes tightly closed he saw once more, for the hundredth time that day, his Master fall at the hands of the Sith, heard his own voice screaming as Qui-Gon sank to his knees. The Sith did not matter. He barely could recall his features though only a few days had passed. But the face of his Master, his friend, as he lay dying in Obi-Wan's arms... If he lived to be as old as Master Yoda and beyond, he would never forget the weight of his friend as he slumped in death, his hand falling away from Obi-Wan's face.

He was even denied the ability to communicate his death to the others. They knew. Of course they knew. A tremor in the Force had sounded across the universe. Coruscant reverberated with Qui-Gon's death knell almost before Obi-Wan understood that his beloved Master was truly gone.

The one moment which brought solace to his aching heart was when he spoke of Qui-Gon's death to Amidala. She had been through so much, and had so much more yet to face. Even so she took the time to express true grief when Obi-Wan finally told her of the outcome of that lonely battle. He was afraid that she might insist upon a State funeral, to honor the hero who had saved her, and through those actions, her people. Obi-Wan was gratified when she immediately understood his suggestion of a simpler, more intimate farewell - the type befitting a friend rather than a Hero. She understood, and she agreed.

"Oh, my Master." His soft words hung in the air, like chilled fog. "I have never needed you more than now."

He did not expect an answer, nor did he receive one. It was another indication that he was not ready. That he heard nothing of Qui-Gon's voice assured him once again - perhaps he would never truly be a Jedi.

"Master," he began again, his words the barest whisper, "you knew I wasn't ready. You knew it. You told them I was. Why?" Twelve years they were together always, never further than a room apart for most of that time. And yet the thought of Anakin rendered that into nothing. His final words were of the boy. Not a farewell, even then.

The tears, unwanted and unwelcome, flowed faster down Obi-Wan's cheeks. "Master... I miss you. I'm sorry. So sorry. He needs you. Without you Anakin is lost. Qui-Gon," his voice shook, just slightly, as he finally dared speak his Master's name, "I would take your place now. If I could." Not even that invoked a response. The Force was silent within him.

The sun set into twilight, then finally full dark. It took time, but he managed to compose himself as the first of the mourners arrived. To them he thought he must seem calm, if resigned. He prayed none saw the obvious - that he had wept to a point beyond tears.

His composure held until he saw the Queen. The others offered their respect, their sympathy. Amidala offered her naked grief. It was a brief look, shared only between the two of them, but it was blistering in its pain. Then it was gone, masked beneath an expression of careful neutrality. Obi-Wan fought to follow her example even as he felt a combination of blinding sorrow and numbing cold sear through his soul. Oh my Master...

When the boy entered he naturally moved to Obi-Wan's side. He had nowhere else to go. They both knew it, and yet rather than draw together in grief, their suffering divided them. Obi-Wan noted it, but knew he could do nothing without fostering a larger lie. The boy was dangerous. The fact was obvious, basic to anyone with eyes to see. He was too old to be trained, the task was impossible. Somehow, in spite of it all, Obi-Wan would have to train him.

How else could Anakin feel? He had experienced less than a decade of life, and he had bonded closely with Qui-Gon. He should have told the boy that the flesh was only a shell, a borrowed cloak which housed an eternal spirit. A Jedi would not take such matters as a physical passing of a temporary body to heart. However, as the pyre was lit Anakin looked as lost as Obi-Wan felt, and there was nothing Obi-Wan could do to ease the boy's pain.

Obi-Wan watched as the smoke from the pyre curled toward the ceiling. Suddenly a dreadful urge overcame him. Jump in. Join him in death. Be together forever. It should have been you anyway. Even as the thought stirred in him, sending his heart pounding, he knew he could not. To do so would be to betray Qui-Gon's final request. All the other lies, half-truths and hidden silences all built toward one goal: Anakin. He was the purpose now, the focus. In the boy, Qui-Gon might be redeemed. If he was trained well.

"What will happen now?"

The question caught him a little off guard, but Obi-Wan still managed to force a small smile, which he hoped was reassuring. "The Council has allowed me to train you," he replied softly. "You will be a Jedi, Anakin. I promise you that." I promise you that on the soul of my dead Master, which hovers over us even now.

Anakin knew. What should have been an assurance was nearly a threat. He knew, and understood, and in that moment Obi-Wan knew the boy was lost.

But even so, he would try. He would fail, but he would try. Such was his devotion to his Master.

End.

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